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Occupy Wall Street: A Movement in the Making

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Occupy Wall Street: a movement in the making

Hannah Kaneck
Spring 2012

Dedicated to my grandmother Jane Armstrong
Special thanks to my parents Karrie and Mike Kaneck, my readers Stephen Valocchi and Sonia Cardenas, the Trinity College Human Rights Program, and to my siblings at Cleo of Alpha Chi

Table of Contents

Timeline leading up to September 17, 2011 Occupation of Wall Street.....	4
Introduction.....	6
Where did they come from?.....	7
New York, NY: A History of Occupation.....	8
Talking Shop and Jamming Hard: Adbusters roots.....	11
Inspiration is Just around the Corner: Bloombergville.....	16
The Devil's in the Details: Organizing through Direct Democracy.....	17
The Occupation.....	18
Human Rights as Guiding Lights.....	20
International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights	
Article 13: The right to education.....	24
Article 11: Adequate standard of living.....	28
Article 12: Highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.....	32
Article 15: Right to partake in culture and share in humanity's progress.....	33
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	
Articles 18 & 19: The freedom to thought, conscience, opinion, and expression.....	35
Since November 15, 2011 Raid on Zuccotti Park.....	36
Struggles with Identity	
A Middle Class Movement.....	38
Where are the 99% going?.....	42
Bibliography.....	47

Timeline leading up to September 17, 2011 Occupation of Wall Street:

Winter 1932: Hooverville shantytown is erected to house excessive numbers of homeless in New York City during the Great Depression

June 16, 1962: The Port Huron Statement is completed by the Students for a Democratic Society

August 17, 1993: the last standing shantytown in New York City, 'the Hill', is deemed a fire hazard and is demolished

November 30, 1999: The anti-WTO protests in Seattle overshadow negotiations of the World Trade Organization in an anti-globalization street protest fighting economic globalization on scale never seen before.

May 5, 2010: A nationwide strike halted transportation and most services throughout Greece in protest of the austerity measures proposed in exchange for a national economic bail out

November 10, 2010: British students protest in opposition to proposed spending cuts in education and an increase of the cap on tuition fees for several months throughout Great Britain

January 25, 2011: Approximately 50,000 protestors occupy Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt in protest of lost democracy

February, 2011: Walkerville Protests begin in Madison, WI against public service budget cuts throughout the state

May 15, 2011: The Indignants movement leads somewhere between 20,000 and 50,000 Spaniards to meet at the Plaza de Cibeles and march to Puerta del Sol in Madrid in protest against austerity

May 31, 2011: Cuomoville is built in a churchyard in Chelsea, Manhattan, NY to fight expiration and non-renewal of rent regulation legislation

June 9, 2011: Kalle Lasn and Micah White agree on the title and register the domain Occupywallstreet.org

June 14, 2011: Bloombergville is erected near City Hall as an anti-austerity movement, in conjunction with the New Yorkers Against Budget Cuts, fighting Mayor Bloomberg's budget proposal to cut jobs throughout the city

June 16, 2011: First General Assembly held at Bloombergville

July 13, 2011: Call by Anonymous Adman at Adbusters to #OCCUPYWALLSTREET via meme that went viral through an email list, blog post, and reddit; Justine Tunney registers Occupywallst.org

July 26, 2011: Invitation by Isham Christie to OWS online supporters to meet at the Bull on August 2, 2011 for a General Assembly originally organized by Bloombergville- New Yorkers Against Budget Cuts to discuss fighting austerity and plan the occupation on September 17, 2011 (S17)

August 2, 2011: First GA at the Charging Bull statue at Bowling Green Park near Wall Street to organize OWS, working groups, and general rules for further planning and GA's, horizontal decision making established as standard moving forward

August 9, 2011: Second GA to plan OWS at the Irish Potato Famine Memorial

August 11, 2011: Outreach update for OWS by Adbusters, mention of multi-city occupation

August 13, 2011: Third GA to plan OWS at Tompkins Square Park

August 23, 2011: Another post by Adbusters using language from tactical meetings, encouraging everyone to stay peaceful in protesting and to never condone violence

August 27, 2011: GA cancelled due to Hurricane Irene!

August 29, 2011: Announcement of the "The 99% Project," an online blog where individuals from anywhere can post their picture and a statement of what they are personally facing to call attention to the human costs of the current political and economic system

September 1, 2011: Nine protestors arrested on Wall Street while peacefully and legally occupying the public sidewalk in preparation for S17

September 3, 2011: Fourth GA to plan OWS at Tompkins Square Park

September 5, 2011: A Tactical Plan on how to hold a legal nonviolent protest in New York City, by the group US Day of Rage, goes viral on the OWS blog

September 15, 2011: Occupy Wall Street Orientation Guide outlines important issues for protestors and goes viral for everyone to read in preparation for S17

September 16, 2011: OWS Help and Directions Call Center opens for inquiries

September 17, 2011: March on Wall Street- Beginning of OWS

Introduction

It has changed the landscape of America in just the last eight months. Cries of “We are the 99%” fill the air. People are angry. Many will argue for years to come what the occupation has actually done for American society, politics and culture. It is clear though that things are changing. A precipice has been reached and it does not seem that those truly devoted to changing the system will back away quietly. Over the last 28 weeks I have read countless articles and interviews of occupiers from all over the world who have converged on Zuccotti Park in Manhattan, New York since September 2011. Reading these articles has not only enlightened my view of social movements and the power of protest in the name of human rights, but it has restored my faith in the promise of American democracy. While there are mountains left to climb before any of us will ever be satisfied, the people of Occupy Wall Street and all the Occupations of the world are fighting. They are fighting hard. The reverberations of change have sat stagnant in the air for a while. Whether it was the turn of the century, the predictions of social apocalypse, the recession or the obvious decline of great cities such as Detroit and New Orleans it is clear that the state of our state is declining. This is a pivotal moment in the history of social justice and change. The Occupy Wall Street phenomenon, some may argue will never be a movement. They are wrong.

In the following essay I attempt to answer three major questions. What is Occupy Wall Street? Where did it come from? And where is it going? The movement is still young and seems to have much more staying power than was predicted in the first few months of the occupation. Occupy has excited generations of complacent peoples to action. Much of the popularity of Occupy stems from its mysterious roots. There is a long and vital history of

activism and social justice in America, one worth taking a look at in conjunction with Occupy Wall Street. Its organization, philosophy, and tactics represent a greater system of rights claiming. The popularity of Occupy Wall Street has brought rights language and assertion into homes and to forums where they were never discussed before through economic inequality. Sure, like any movement, Occupy has its “issues”. These issues are not new or unique to Occupy, but our reaction to these issues and struggles will shed light on what this movement can mean moving forward. Understanding what Occupy is and all the possible routes it could take from here will lead to choices. Where, when and by whom these choices will be made is still unclear. This is an unfinished story.

Where did they come from?

It seems to have been the question on every one’s lips from the very beginning: Where did Occupy Wall Street come from? Stop to ask a student on a college campus or someone sitting at home watching prime time news and the protestors flooding lower Manhattan seem to have popped up out of nowhere. A little more searching will lead most to the July 13, 2011 call from the anonymous adman of Adbusters. The simple blog post calling for readers to flood lower Manhattan on September 17, 2011 to peacefully protest “corporateocracy” in the “financial Gomorrah of America,” Wall Street, is now famous (Anonymous, 2011). But there is a story much bigger than most realize. The emergence of social justice movements in America has a long and rich history.

Understanding how a movement comes to fruition can feed interpretations of what the movement is and why it is. Movements historically emerge when and where they do for several reasons. Most commonly and most notably because of factors such as political division

among elites, the lessening or increase of repression from police and military, economic conditions, increased population density, and in recent years cultural factors. These conditions have laid the ground work for Occupy Wall Street (OWS) just as they have for the Civil Rights movement, the Women's Rights movement, and the Gay Liberation movement (Goodwin, 2003). While it is important to identify these correlations and honor predecessors for their contribution to this movement, it is also necessary to recognize the factors that characterize OWS as a uniquely 21st century movement. The social movements claimed by our mothers and fathers have greatly shaped society's ideas of what a protest is and what it should be. The phrase, "you had to be there to see it," rolls so nostalgically off the tongue, but this is 2012 and no one has to go further than their computer screen to take part in the movements emerging around the world. While many have been busy just trying to keep up with what happens daily on Wall Street and around the world since early 2010, the origins of Occupy Wall Street have been buried under social media storms. Uncovering the origins of Occupy Wall Street presents as a difficult task. The self-proclaimed leaderless movement has worked hard to deemphasize its origins for fear of distraction. The birth of the Occupy movement is an important moment in America's history of social reform, human rights, and political activism. Answering the question where did Occupy come from, will begin to define a new generation and a new era in a global history.

New York, NY: A History of Occupation

In 1929 an economic shockwave hit the pockets of every American when the stock market crashed and the Great Depression set in. By the winter of 1932-1933 approximately 1.2 million Americans were homeless. In late 1930 in the middle of Central Park a shanty town by

the name of 'Hooverville' was formed to house some of the 2,000 homeless of New York City. Hooverville was one of hundreds throughout the country named for the then U.S. president, who many blamed for not addressing the immense suffering caused by the depression (Gray, 1993). This first New York City encampment was built out of necessity, but now just as then, the physical presence of homelessness in light of economic hardship speaks loudly to a nation in need.

Since 'Hooverville', New York City has seen its share of shantytowns. The last legal shantytown in New York City was at the base of the Manhattan Bridge and was informally known as 'the Hill.' Famous for its rough yet self-sustained style of living, the Hill had functioned contained for years, but had grown through notoriety in the media as a homeless community. It was not until August 17, 1993, when 'the Hill' was deemed a fire hazard and was bulldozed to the ground, the city could proclaim itself free of such encampments (Fisher, 1993).

Almost twenty years later, Occupy Wall Street created an encampment that provided shelter for homeless, jobless, and many more all wishing to take part in the movement. While the initial occupiers of Wall Street were not homeless as they were in the shanty towns, many of the occupiers today are and addressing homelessness has become a major issue for the movement on the ground. Similar systematic structures of economic oppression through the stock market and corporate greed have led so many to build this encampment. Both the shantytowns and OWS represent alternative homes on the periphery of society facing the struggles of the poor and powerless. Physical occupation of space and how the space is utilized is a key factor in OWS's link to its historical roots as a movement and its identity as a movement

in the cyberspace age. But the plan to physically occupy for the sake of reform did not manifest out of thin air...

Just as the Hoovervilles of the Depression encampments named for the politicians they are fighting have begun to pop up throughout the U.S., protestors have set up tent cities to fight against policy changes in Madison, WI and in Chelsea, New York, NY. Walkerville, the encampment in Madison, was built to fight Governor Scott Walker's proposal for budget cuts to public services in Wisconsin and started protesting in February and camping on June 5, 2011 (Ferguson, 2011). The first Cuomoville¹ was built in a churchyard in Chelsea, Manhattan on May 31, 2011 to protest the expiration of rent regulation laws in New York (Colvin, 2011). Inspired by these occupational protests here at home and by many abroad as well, a group of New York City activists formed an encampment and protest of their own. No not Occupy Wall Street, at least not yet. The encampment was named Bloombergville and found its home near City Hall on June 14, 2011, where they stood in solidarity against Governor Michael Bloomberg's plan to lay off teachers, close fire stations and cut public services around the city (See Figure 1. General Assembly at Bloombergville.) (Roblin, 2011). These encampments laid the groundwork for Occupy Wall Street without even knowing it. But there was something missing from the equation. A philosophy, a greater audience, an act of inspiration was needed to create a global movement.

¹ The first Cuomoville set up in a churchyard in Chelsea was to protest an expiration of a rent control bill that was being ignored by the state. Since the Occupy Wall Street movement branched out into other cities the campers in Albany, NY at the capitol began to be known as Cuomoville at Occupy Albany. The first Cuomoville encampment was in fact not in Albany (Colvin, 2011).



Figure 1. A general assembly invoking direct democracy at Bloombergville, before the call to Occupy was published. (BloombergvilleNow!, 2011)

Talking Shop and Jamming Hard: Adbusters roots

If there is a single person to which the idea to occupy may be credited, that person is Kalle Lasn. Lasn's story begins in the parking lot of a grocery, where he became overtly frustrated with a shopping cart security system. A coin receptor on each cart took coins as collateral for using the cart while one shopped. So frustrated with the blatant customer mistrust this mechanism represented, he jammed a bent coin in the slot, rendering the cart unusable. So who is this Lasn character and what does his frustration with our consumer culture have to do with anything at all? Kalle Lasn is the co-founder of the media foundation of Adbusters. Frustrated with consumerism, Lasn writes and acts as a culture jammer; a culture jam is any act designed to subvert mainstream society. Adbusters' magazine² was founded in

² Adbusters readership generally consists of those interested in business, advertising, and popular culture (Alternative Press Center). Heavy imagery, quotation and revolutionary rants

1989 and uses culture jamming of mainstream media to flip the game of consumerism upside down (Lasn, 1999). Lasn is quoted as saying “I have a feeling that, uh, right now that this human experiment on planet earth is hitting the wall in many, many ways (Kaste, 2011).” One can imagine this eccentric looking Estonian man preaching about the corrupt power of advertisement to the young ideologues employed to publish his magazine. (See Figure 3. Lasn) Adbusters is Lasn’s idea factory, where advertisement, media, and television work against themselves through social networking, campaigns, the magazine and the blog to turn heads and open eyes of consumers to the prepackaged culture being fed to us on a daily basis (Kaste, 2011)³.

Senior editor at Adbusters, Micah White has been actively fighting authority his whole life. It was an exchange that White and Lasn had early in June of 2011 that produced the idea to camp out, the actual name of the movement: Occupy Wall Street, and the start date: September 17. Together they agreed upon what the first meme⁴ would constitute and how to frame it around “America’s own Tahrir moment,” and on June 9, 2011 Lasn registered the Occupywallstreet.org domain (Schwartz, 2011). The revolutionary start button had been pushed.

about today’s consumer culture make up the colorful subject based magazines. (See Figure 2. A shot from Adbusters magazine)

⁴ A meme is an image or video passed from one internet user to another; a play on the original definition which is an element of culture or behavior that is passed from person to person by non-genetic means (Graham, 2002). The Adbusters meme that made the call to occupy was a simple black block with the titles, date, and request to occupy lower Manhattan. (See Figure 4. The OWS meme itself.)

Lasn and White sought to move their revolution of culture jamming into the streets. Culture jamming was just one of many forms that neo-activism had taken on since the end of the 20th century into the new millennium. Groups and actions such as the Lower East Side Collective (LESC), ACT UP, Reclaim the Streets, SexPanic!, and the Seattle Rebellion, most commonly referred to as the WTO (action to block meetings at the World Trade Organization) have worked throughout the late 80's, 90's, and into the 2000's to fight mainstream culture and the negative effects of globalization through cultural revolution. This new age activism had strong roots in New York City, the queer mecca of the East coast, where the issue of AIDs had grown to epidemic proportions and in the late 1980's brought the LGBTQ, SM, Fetish, and many other groups seen as sexually subversive to the forefront to fight for not only their right to assemble but also their right to affordable drug therapies. This action in particular used camping in various areas of the city to get noticed. Drawing many parallels, the group Reclaim the Streets/ New York (RTS/NY) tried to organize one of their many street parties on Wall Street on June 18, 1999, but were shut down before they could even try by the NYPD. In November of that same year, the group boycotted shopping and threw a dance party in Time Square stopping traffic for over an hour on national "Buy Nothing Day," protesting the busiest shopping day of the year. This action was to stand in solidarity with those organizing the kick-off of the anti-WTO protests in Seattle (Shepard & Hayduk, 2002).

Lasn had just finished his book *Culture Jam* as the battle in Seattle took off. He made his way to Seattle where he found a lot of new strategies for culture jamming and Cultural Revolution (Rosenberg, 2001). The anti-WTO battle in Seattle was one of the first American protests to utilize theatrical, artistic, ironic culture jamming as street politics against global

capitalism and the first time “meme warfare” was used. The use of the internet, radio, email, posters, and blogs to keep clear the message of the Carnavalesque protesters in the streets allowed activism to evolve. Andrew Boyd writes about WTO,

To others this brand of theatrical Do-It-Yourself (DIY) street politics represents a new kind of anti-corporate movement distinguished by creativity, self-organization, coalition building, and the will to take on global capitalism... Seattle showed that street protest can be a place where diverse subcultures can mix it up, where steelworkers and tree-huggers can learn how to party together, where young people can experiment with new ways of being and then pronounce, as much to themselves as the world, ‘*This is what democracy looks like!*’ (Shepard & Hayduk, 2002).

Much like the critics of OWS, those that look back on the surge of protests in 1999 argue that the actions were unfocused, and much like the defenders of those protesting today, many argue that those people are missing the point. The action taken in Seattle was a convergence of many small movements with a common belief that the system of global deregulation was at fault for the decline in culture and rights fulfillment around the world. In much of the writing done after the Seattle battle, credit is given to the internet for the ability to organize and mobilize all of these smaller units, but as Naomi Klein poignantly highlights, it is the internet that has allowed for the unstructured anti-hierarchy form of the movement as well (Shepard & Hayduk, 2002). As lessons are learned from history, Lasn and White have done their studying. It seems as if they wished to see more of this Cultural Revolution on a global scale, to startup where WTO had left off. The philosophies behind meme warfare and anti-hierarchical or leaderless protests are all manifest in OWS. OWS, just as WTO is an action of many subcultures standing against global corporate welfare, autonomy, and monopoly. OWS when linked to WTO and Lasn’s work with culture jamming becomes more than just Occupy Wall Street, it becomes part of a greater history of activism at the dawning of a new century; it becomes a movement.

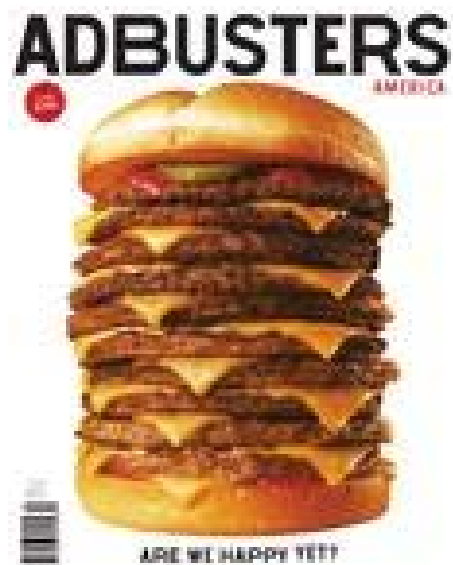


Figure 2. Cover of Adbusters Magazine. (AdBusters, 2012)

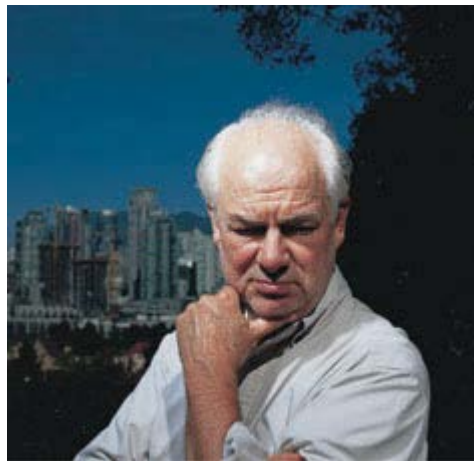


Figure 3. Kalle Lasn. (Rapoza, 2011)



Figure 4. The call to occupy. (AdBusters, #OCCUPYWALLSTREET, 2011)

Inspiration is Just around the Corner: Bloombergville

A direct reference to the Hoovervilles of the 1930's, Bloombergville is where the collision of on-the-ground protestors and Lasn and White's inspirational meme collide and the climb to September 17, 2011 begins. Protesting for two weeks in a large eclectic group of individuals, were members of New Yorkers Against Budget Cuts (NYABC) such as Isham Christie a CUNY graduate student and Yotam Marom the General Secretary of the NY branch of the Organization for a Free Society (OFS) (Roblin, 2011). They have been key players in linking the Bloombergville movement to the Occupy Wall Street movement. Isham was the second person to post on the OccupyWallSt.org Blog, calling for an official organizing General Assembly (GA) on Wall Street at The Charging Bull (Christie, 2011). He was present and active at Bloombergville and attended this August 2 GA to address logistics and set up working groups to organize the various details of the September 17 occupation. Since then he has continued to be a lead organizer throughout OWS. Isham is one of the only individuals to list his personal email on the OWS blog (Captain, 2011). Yotam Marom was one of the original thirteen to be arrested during Bloombergville protests within the lobby of 250 Broadway where the city councilmen's offices are located. Tied together in a circle with zip ties, refusing to leave while the vote on the budget proposal was being discussed, the thirteen were taken down to Central Booking, known as "the Tombs" and were exposed to the disgusting conditions and overt racism inflicted on the poor of New York. Yotam is a seasoned activist, working with the Organization for a Free Society (OFS)⁵ and a lead organizer within OWS (Roblin, 2011).

⁵ Explanation of OFS: "The Organization for a Free Society is an organization with a holistic analysis that emphasizes the need for vision in all realms of social life and organizes to help build and participate in a mass movement of people really capable of taking power, of fighting

In an interview with Yotam Marom by Stephen Roblin for the Independent Reader on July 19th, 2011, just after the call to occupy came out by Adbusters, Marom explains his experience with Bloombergville and hints at future plans. He states,

On one hand, Bloombergville served as a base camp - a sort of launch-pad for a continuous struggle against the budget cuts - but at the same time, it was an alternative space where people could come to sleep, eat, teach, learn, radicalize, make friends, and work as we all struggled together. It was a genuine attempt to reclaim space in the process of a political struggle against austerity measures that would truly endanger the lives of working people all across the city (Roblin, 2011).

Does this sound familiar? It should. Reclaiming space, political struggle, and a place to sleep, eat, teach, and learn is exactly what was set out to be established on September 17, 2011 on Wall Street. The tremendous influence that the Bloombergville-ers had on the development of OWS is undeniably obvious. Marom continues,

Bloombergville is sort of packed up at this point, so it's more or less done with as a physical space for now, ready to be unpacked in other places or at another time if it fits the context and meets the needs of the struggle we're in. We've already had (since the vote), at least three big meetings where we discussed next steps... (Roblin, 2011).

During its two week encampment, Bloombergville held its first General Assembly on June 16, 2011. Just like the General Assemblies held in Liberty Square of OWS people sat and stood around with their signs and shirts reading slogans of protest, discussing the issues and how to combat them a whole month before the Adbusters call to occupy was posted.

The Devil's in the Details: Organizing through Direct Democracy

Before the August 2 GA, Micah White contacted the New Yorkers Against Budget Cuts (Schwartz, 2011). The August 2 meeting was originally going to be an anti-austerity protest, but

to replace institutions that exploit and oppress with those that encourage solidarity, equity, self-management, and diversity. We participate in grassroots movements and struggles, to lend our weight to them, to learn from them, and to push them forward," (Roblin, 2011).

the NYABC activists agreed with White to get on board with OWS and dedicate part of their GA to organizing. Mass confusion ensued. As many showed up to protest and many others to organize, a clear divide surfaced and two separate groups emerged. When it became clear that many were there solely to prepare to march or rally around a few specific causes some present decided to step away. Many of the members of the NYABC, some anarchists and individuals looking to actually be a part of the planning wanted to have a true GA with group discussion and consensus decision making. So they met separately and slowly but surely those part of the rally saw the light of direct democracy and made their way into the discussion; this was a rocky start to say the least (Jezb, 2011).

After the August 2 GA things began to move in rapid succession: three more GA's in Manhattan, an explosion of social media storms and discussion of logistics, working group meetings all over and even another call to action by Adbusters. The making of Occupy Wall Street had many reflections of past social movements in America, but the clearest difference was the medium in which the movement moved: the internet.

The Occupation

If one were to picture the internet as a web of connections and meetings splayed out from several major hubs, the clusters would most likely include Google, Facebook, Twitter and several other information-age giants. It was from these hubs that the information needed to organize was sent to the screens of thousands of activists, students, laborers and academics inhabiting the island of Manhattan and the boroughs surrounding it. Up until the occupation on September 17 the organization had followed a linear trajectory with only a couple General Assemblies acting as pit stops on a road with a specific goal: to Occupy Wall Street. When the

day came and the exact location was established the protest spun out into a matrix resembling that of the internet. Often described as chaotic, the protests had come to embody the medium in which the movement would be defined. Working together park space and cyberspace created a model too complicated for linear narrative or organization, but there was an organization beneath the chaos. Working against the traditional representative democracy and instead choosing horizontal decision making the Occupy movement organized around the philosophical roots of the protest.

In the early days of the occupation, OWS became most infamous for the small colony they had built in Zuccotti Park. Deemed Liberty Square the space was ground zero for the movement and quickly established a structure to accommodate the comfort of the activists and the organization of the occupation in general. As individuals, members of NGO's, long time activists, homeless, and many other organizations descended on the park it became clear that they were all there for different reasons. The collective occupation was a unification of smaller subunits of protest gathered under the umbrella of outrage and they were standing in solidarity against the violation of their civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

Many of these smaller units formed working groups. The biggest of the working groups were those that needed physical space and more people to organize. The park was zoned for each of the bigger groups, such as the People's Library, the People's Kitchen, Medic, Arts and Culture, Sanitation, Tech Ops and Media, Info, Comfort and Legal. Big groups without permanent spaces included De-escalation, Direct Action, Accountability and Transparency, Town Planning, Translation, Political Reform, and the People of Color Working Groups. The most influential working groups in these two lists are designated as operational groups.

Operational groups are those defined as “groups that are contributing to the logistical and financial operations of Occupy Wall Street on a consistent basis. They are open and accessible and required to produce a written charter describing what they do and how people can get involved,” (Assembly, 2012). The groups without somewhat permanent space in the park set up stands or tables during the day and would break down at night to make room for campers. Each group had specific goals and worked together to fulfill them. Each group was fighting for different rights or working with another group to fulfill those rights. The 89+ (and growing) working groups make up the actively engaged organized body of Occupy Wall Street. The working groups represent a great challenge to OWS. These groups became necessary as the movement rejected top down decision making and chose horizontal decision making as a key method for organizing. They function without hierarchy which makes no group technically more important or more influential in decision making or action organizing. The working groups represent the wide array of agendas and all the different people that are needed to organize an action based movement. Logistical and political management of physical space and people became easier with the structure of working groups. With so many different groups registered with the General Assembly every person can put their individual skills at work for the movement while also working towards a goal that matters to them personally. As each of the major working groups claimed physical space within the park, they were proclaiming their demand for the specific rights they were working towards reclaiming as Americans.

Human Rights as Guiding Lights

The institutions of universal human rights and global civic society have never been more cited than they are today. Through globalization and the rights revolution over the last fifty

years utilization of rights and the claiming process have expanded dramatically through “the influence of advocacy groups, the establishment of governmental enforcement agencies, the growth of financial and legal resources for ordinary citizens, and the strategic planning of grass roots organizations (Epp, 1998).” Watching the nightly news, CNN or BBC one hears rights language in conversations about international trade and economy, war, and diplomacy. Today rights language is utilized domestically through news of Occupy Wall Street. Their slogan alone, “We are the 99%” screams class warfare and demands accountability by the wealthiest 1%. The issues occupiers are raising and want to be addressed are articulated with human rights language. In the past the US has faced civil, political, and social issues in the domestic context of anti-war, anti-racism, and feminist protesting. Today, economic rights issues are being addressed through linking the language and discourse of these past protests to the class warfare context of today’s broadening class distributions. Never before have phrases such as corporate greed, healthcare as a human right, or direct democracy been more heard or understood than they are today. Understanding the structures in which human rights language originated and how the use of rights language throughout Occupy correlate will shed light on the impact the movement is having on not only our cultural and social ideologies, but our politics as well.

The system in which human rights have always been invoked is that of the international, the global community. Those fighting against global corporate deregulation often cite organizations like the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank as institutions of fault. Standing as a beacon of opposition to these international organizations of capitalism are institutions such as the United Nations. The United Nations was

established via charter in 1945. Today it consists of approximately 192 states and is the foremost institution of international opinion and law (United Nations, 2012). Since its inception the UN has helped draft, bring into action and regulate thousands of resolutions, reports, and treaties. Of these documents the most famous and encompassing are that of the International Bill of Human Rights, which consists of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) is a treaty that advocates for the allocation of essential resources to citizens of states party to the treaty and those in need elsewhere. The ICESCR is a treaty of international law to complement the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The rights outlined in the ICESCR are often referred to as positive rights, or rights to certain things as opposed to the negative rights or rights from certain things, as seen in the ICCPR. ICESCR rights include, but are not limited to the right to education, an adequate standard of living, health, adequate conditions in the work place and other social, economic, and cultural rights. Together the ICESCR and the ICCPR are referred to as the twin covenants. When a state signs and ratifies a treaty they are consenting to the adoption of the language and overall agreement of the treaty. The United States has signed and ratified the ICCPR, but has yet to ratify the ICESCR. These twin covenants work together to embody the more ambiguous language of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). It is the human rights language and ideology presented in these documents that has seeped into the roots of activism today. Without the knowledge or language of rights the claiming of rights is impossible. The occupiers of Wall Street have sculpted their movement

around these major works of rights proclamation by utilizing their language and proclaiming their rights every day. Occupy Wall Street has also drafted their own piece of rights documentation, *The 99 Percent Declaration* was presented to the NYCGA on October 15, 2011 and outlines all the issues occupiers wish to be addressed by July 4, 2012 by the U.S. government (The99PercentWorkingGroup, 2011). This document outlines demands, sets a timeline, and clearly states the rights violations (just like the human rights declaration and treaties) of the US that need to be addressed. The declaration works to marry the human rights discourse with the economic inequality discourse most prevalent at Occupy.

Before the September 17 occupation of Wall Street there was a linear progression of actions and discussions surrounding the movement. Plan, meet, organize, and establish came one by one with a little guidance from experienced activists on the periphery. Ideas and concerns were many but the focus of occupying effectively kept this process moving forward. But when the occupation took claim to Zuccotti Park progress radiated out from the center of the movement, where the park was the nucleus and actions and working groups were strings in the web. At the end of each strand was a working group that focused on the fulfillment of a different right or set of rights. In a sense, each article of the Twin Covenants claimed a corner of the park. The right to education, healthcare, food, clothing, housing, work, to organize, thought, conscience, religion, and so many more were 'spacialized' in the park. Liberty Square was doing a better job providing these inherent rights to those occupying than the federal government was to its citizens.

International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

Article 13: The right to education

I made it to Manhattan on the night of October 28, 2011. A friend of mine, a dancer and activist from Bed-Stuy texted me earlier that afternoon, and had directed me to meet her at the library when I got to OWS. I was not sure where that was, what it looked like, or even how big the park was. I stopped at the McDonalds across the street, the unofficial indoor plumbing supplier of the movement. All I could see from there was a flood light, a huge crowd of people and every corner lined with police. I had knots in my stomach. This was an event every young passionate person studying human rights wishes to be a part of. I crossed the street and came to the steps of Zuccotti Park, where at the front of the park I could see a huge group of people engaged in a GA. To my right was what I assumed was the library and to the left the children and parents sleeping area. I walked up to the tables covered in Tupperware's filled with books, the People's Library.

Article 13 of the ICESCR proclaims that all states party to the covenant recognize the right to education for all in pursuit of progress, tolerance, dignity, and understanding between people of all different race, ethnicities, and religions (Center for the Study of Human Rights Columbia University, 2005). The People's Library of Occupy Wall Street was located in the North West corner of Zuccotti Park where it provided free public access to their collection of books, zines, pamphlets, newspapers, and many other materials. At the peak of the occupation in Liberty Square the library lent books from their small corner. A working group, in charge of the library, made sure the books were covered when it rained and tried their best to organize all the donations coming in every day. When the October 13 call from Bloomberg to clean up the park was made the library tried its hardest to stockpile the books as necessary and keep people

from removing them in the cleaning process. This was a failure and that night all the books were either cleared out or put in storage. After this original clearing of the library, it came back with great force. A tent was erected to cover the tables of books and the library was quite substantial. Unfortunately, the November 15 raid by the NYPD destroyed most of the People's Library for a second time. Thanks to continued donations the library has been reborn, occupiers call it Library 3.0. Today the library is mobile. In shopping carts and bins the books move from storage areas back to the park via librarians (Occupy Wall Street Library Working Group, 2011). (See Figures 5 & 6: The people's library)

It has always been Occupy's greatest struggle to clarify what the people want, what they are fighting for. It became obvious early on that many were angry about the high cost of tuition in the United States. While this was just one of many important concerns of the movement, it was a concern that brought students into the movement and one that was politically charged. Obama infamously campaigned in 2008 to make higher education more affordable for all Americans (Pickler, 2008). Students from across the country were showing up in downtown Manhattan, because like so many others they could not afford to go to college. I met a girl named Abby, who had hitchhiked from Georgia with her friends, dumpster diving along the way for food. She was smart. I asked her if she was a student. She replied, "No, I wanted to go to Emory, but I couldn't afford it. I was just working at Subway when [my friend] asked me to come up here with him." This minimum wage job, offering no benefits or mobility was easy for this young woman to leave. She saw hope in the movement for a better situation than even the employed one she was occupying in Georgia. The library is not the sole fighter for education in the movement though. OWS has also claimed education rights through the 99 Percent

Declaration, which calls for student loan debt refinancing as well as emergency public school reform (The99PercentWorkingGroup, 2011).

On October 25, 2011 the movement occupied the Department of Education by attending a Panel for Education Policy meeting where occupiers used the human microphone to be project a speech to the panel. The panel had planned for the movement's presence and tried to set up a process in which they felt everyone could be heard, but the occupiers had their own plan. The panel was disgruntled by the occupiers' use of the (somewhat loud and disruptive) human microphone methods and decided to leave the room without discussion when a young woman ran up to the stage to invite Chancellor Dennis Walcott to participate in a GA on education, she was ignored as he exited the auditorium. A third grade girl stood up and used the human microphone to demand smaller class sizes and more art and music in her school. This was just one of many actions taken around the right to education. Occupy the DOE (Department of Education) has established itself outside of the OWS movement to plan actions of their own targeting the New York City public education system (DOE, 2011).

Just like healthcare, good education and higher learning in America have been set aside for the few wealthy that can afford it. As Americans look to the north to Canada or east to Europe they see states where deficits are run on universal health care costs instead of military and where citizens are guaranteed affordable higher education in good universities. When longtime activist, writer, and professor Francis Fox Piven spoke at a GA in New York she spoke of the untaxed CEOs and corporations that insist the feds cut spending in schools to save money. Education is the foundation of our nation's strength and position in the world. Without it all other facets of our lives will crumble. The occupiers at OWS understand the inherent value

of a free education and have worked to spread that ideal through the People's Library. Since the library was established at Wall Street at least nine other libraries have sprung up at occupations around the world, including Our School (in solidarity with Occupy Portland), People's Library of Vancouver, Canada, Biblioteca Acampada Sol, and Occupy Baltimore People's Library just to name a few. Addressing the right to education through the physical embodiment and literal provision of free education in the form of a library was genius. The People's Library has long collected its own funds, contributing almost all of it to the sum account of OWS. It is the second most well-orchestrated working group in the movement, because it stands for something so important to the people.



Figure 5. The People's Library at night.



Figure 6. The People's Library. (Occupy Wall Street Library Working Group, 2011).

Article 11: Adequate standard of living

Arguably the most well-orchestrated working group of the OWS movement has been the People's Kitchen. Located at the heart of Zuccotti Park, the kitchen was a rectangular space bordered by long tables on each side with a few generators and quite a few people running around with messy aprons on the interior, restocking food as it quickly disappeared. Written about and praised as the fuel of the OWS movement, the People's Kitchen offered free meals to anyone who needs to eat in the park (See Figure 7. The People's Kitchen). Early on, this was one of the greatest logistical challenges that the organizers faced. A forum on the OccupyWallSt.org blog spoke about the initial plans to make massive vats of rice and beans, but that cooking and keeping warm the food they made would become too difficult a task, so they started collecting provisions for sandwiches. As the calls went out by organizers for help farmers, chefs, priests, and many others came jumping out of the woodwork to help the movement. In the first couple weeks pizza shops all over the city set up online ordering for people anywhere in the world to

buy a pizza for the occupiers. Would you like to order an OccuPie? Some shops donated a pizza for every ten they sold. Donations of prepared food from all over the city helped supplement the food being prepared in nearby apartments. The night I arrived at OWS they were serving chicken soup (I must admit I felt bad taking the food. I instead went to a nearby halal truck and bought some falafel). The kitchen volunteers are multi-taskers, serving food, accepting donations, cleaning, and cooking.

Article 11 of the ICESCR states, “The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing,” (Center for the Study of Human Rights Columbia University, 2005). As the People’s kitchen continued to turn out hot food for everyone partaking in the action, other groups around Zuccotti Park were doing their part to fulfill the other provisions in this article. The Comfort working group had a table and some large bins and plastic drawers that they kept things like shoes, pants, sleeping bags and other provisions necessary to make those sleeping in the park more comfortable. Much of the supplies were donated and sent from all over, but some were bought by the working group. Those in charge would take stock of what they needed and would present an itemized list and budget for supplies at a GA to be voted on. I voted in favor of the purchase of five pairs of winter boots for some people working regularly in the park. So food was covered and clothing, at least for those in the park, but the issue of housing was much bigger.

There were two housing working groups established, the first, Housing, was established to find places for occupiers to sleep directly following the eviction on November 15. The second, Occupy Homes was established to, “organize with communities and groups around NYC

to liberate vacant space held hostage by the 1%. Our work helps Vacant houses become homes when families move in, empty buildings fill with purpose when they begin to shelter educators, medical care and other service providers and communities empower themselves as they liberate and transition their environment to serve the needs of the people (Occupy Homes, 2012).” This group organized with families who had been foreclosed upon throughout the city for a national day of action on December 6, 2011. Occupiers gathered to reoccupy the homes taken by the banks in protest. They used the ‘hashtag’ #OCCUPYOURHOMES and posted “Housing is a Human Right (OccupyWallSt, News Archive History Dec. 1, 2011 Occupy Wall Street Goes Home, 2011).” A large number of occupiers toured through Brooklyn looking at foreclosed homes. Professor Christopher Vitale calls this “cross-activism,” when a group of people fighting for something demand greater change for a more broadly oppressed group to find common ground (See Figure 8. Occupy Our Homes Brooklyn) (Vitale, 2011). While I disagree with his designation, because Occupy Our Homes is a huge part of what Occupy Wall Street stands for, this move into communities speaks loudly to the action being taken to reclaim economic rights through the movement. Just in the month of July 2011 one in every 611 American homes were foreclosed upon (CNBC, 2011). Occupiers blame big banks for generating profits rather than working for their customers, ensuring sensible mortgages. Just like education rights, OWS has claimed housing rights in the 99 Percent Declaration, which demands a “Foreclosure Moratorium, Mortgage Refinancing and Principle Write Downs (The99PercentWorkingGroup, 2011).” Occupy Our Homes has inspired others around the country to occupy foreclosed buildings, schools, and homes. Some have organized actions to attend bank auctions of foreclosed homes to deter buyers from purchasing. This movement to

occupy foreclosures speaks loudly to the mortgage crisis in America that has been an issue for years. Fighting for the right to housing can seem almost futile when so many are homeless, but when middle class citizens are taken advantage of by banks, it is easier for them to articulate the injustice.



Figure 7. The People's Kitchen at Occupy Wall Street. (Hutchings, 2011)



Figure 8. Occupy Our Homes. (Vitale, 2011)

Article 12: Highest attainable standard of physical and mental health

Article 12 of the ICESCR states,

The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health... the improvement of all aspects of environment and industrial hygiene... the creation of conditions which would assure to all medical service and medical attention in the event of sickness. (Center for the Study of Human Rights Columbia University, 2005)

There are quite a few working groups fighting for this right. Whether it is the Medic working group, Healthcare for the 99%, Environmental Solidarity, or Earth Summit this right is a lot to fight for. Socialized medicine has long been a hot button issue in American politics. In George Halverson's *Health Care Will Not Reform Itself*, he argues for universal health care coverage on the basis of economics. He writes, "Universal coverage is a first step... the truth is that covering everyone in the country can significantly reduce the price of insurance premiums needed to cover families in America (Halverson, 2009)." NGO's such as Amnesty International have started campaigns for the promotion of healthcare as a human right. Their Demand Dignity campaign focuses on universality, equity, and accessibility (AmnestyInternational, 2012). Healthcare for the 99% works to support the Medic working group with supplies and people, they also educate through awareness of the base causes of health injustices, and amplify the voices of those oppressed and left out of the healthcare reform policy discussions. Just like the people's library and kitchen, Medic had a physical presence in Zuccotti Park. Demanded in the 99 Percent Declaration is, "Health Care for All. Medicare for all or adoption of a universal single-payer healthcare system. The broken Medicaid program will be eliminated as redundant. Affordable health care for all shall be a human right (The99PercentWorkingGroup, 2011)." The right to

health and therefore health care is controversial, but its presence at Occupy challenges our understanding of healthcare as a commodity rather than as a public good.

The first GA I attended in Zuccotti Park, a doctor stood up during “soapbox⁶” to proclaim that as a physician and resident of New York he stood in solidarity with Occupy Wall Street. He had just finished a 36 hour shift and had come straight to the park for the GA. It was inspiring to see a physician take time out of his busy schedule to come down to the park to help.

Part of the right to health is the duty to improve the environment and hold industries accountable for their impact on the environment. While this is a more narrow human rights based outlook on environmental protection and conservation, those fighting for environmental rights are some of the most enthusiastic protesters at Occupy. Individuals fighting fracking and the installment of the Keystone pipeline can be found every day in Liberty Plaza. So important to the movement, environmentalists worked to add “Protection of the Planet” to Occupy Wall Street’s *The 99 Percent Declaration* (The99PercentWorkingGroup, 2011). The proclamation of this right encompasses many issues that Occupy is working for and is a great illustration of how the movement refuses to focus on one or two aspects of oppression. Only highlighting one or two aspects would be narrow minded and counterproductive to what the movement seems to be trying to achieve.

Article 15: Right to partake in culture and share in humanity’s progress

It may seem like a luxury to some for the Occupiers to partake in the arts, culture, design, and musical aspects of protest. Some argue that the protestors are just having a good

⁶ Soapbox is a time following the GA where those wishing to make a comment or statement in solidarity or otherwise can speak without taking up decision making time during the actual GA.

time, just partying in Zuccotti. As seen at WTO, this public street art protest is both creative and productive. Article 15 of the ICESCR states,

The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone: to take part in cultural life; to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications; to benefit from the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author. (Center for the Study of Human Rights Columbia University, 2005)

Again with physical presence in the park, working groups such as Arts and Culture, Design, Sustainability and Music work to claim the rights stated in article 15. One of the biggest issues that OWS has faced has been the restriction of drummers and musicians in the park at certain hours of the day and night. It seems like a small logistical issue, but people's need to make music in light of this protest was integral to the morale and vibe of the movement. Unlike the previous rights, this right was not stated in the 99 Percent Declaration. An inherent aspect to every occupied space ritual, arts, and music may have been taken for granted in the process of writing the declaration. This may be due to America's persistent protest to any forms of censorship. If it were not for the creative energy and work by all the occupiers around America OWS would not partake in the popularity it has. Beautiful, creative, and original signs posted all over the internet and the streets of New York have called for marches and actions. The Occupy related art work alone will be studied for years. Photographers and filmmakers were flooding the park the day I arrived. The right to art and culture and science is visibly claimed in every corner of Zuccotti. Art is essential to our wellbeing and is one of the greatest tools utilized by the peaceful protestors of OWS.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Articles 18 & 19: The freedom to thought, conscience, opinion, and expression

Since the beginning of OWS young freelance journalists and writers for alternative publications have been taking footage and interviewing protestors on Wall Street. Journalism has been democratized through the movement: anyone can be a reporter, a member of the press. Media coverage of the movement has been widely scrutinized, first for not existing and then secondly for portraying biased viewpoints of the protest. Several reports by major news outlets have been false and have had to issue apologies to the movement. Instead of covering the issues and the reasons why protestors were there, media tended to highlight police brutality and expressed continued confusion over why the protestors were there rather than ask. (Stelter, November 20, 2011) This lack of media coverage and false media coverage becomes an issue as the movement wishes to assert its rights to thought, conscience, opinion, expression, and speech. Some would argue that no one is keeping those protesting from expressing their opinion, but without major media coverage the movement cannot get the kind of mass appeal it needs to move forward.

Since this issue arose, many independent reporters have taken it into their own hands to record the movement. The media working group was formed to update the blog and to stream video of GA's and other important events in the park. A young man by the name of Tim Pool began live streaming video of the protests from his cell phone, and though he considers himself separate from the occupiers, he was treated as a protestor rather than a journalist by the police. (Stelter, November 20, 2011) This issue has brought first amendment rights into question as well. This most essential right is the single most important tool of the occupiers. The proclamation of this right is best displayed in the use of the NYC GA. Every evening,

protestors gather to participate in direct democracy, horizontal decision making, and consciousness raising through the general assembly. If the movement continues to successfully marry a focus on human rights with a focus on economic inequality a shift in discourse that would highlight the importance of a treaty such as the ICESCR could mean a new outlook for American politics and policy making.

While rights language and assertion of human rights are distinctly part of the movement's identity, it has had difficulty defining other parts of its identity. These difficulties are what will subsequently decide the fate of the movement in the eyes of the rest of the U.S. and the global community.

Since November 15, 2011 Raid on Zuccotti Park

On November 15, 2011 at 1am the NYPD entered the park to hand out fliers asking protestors to leave. Those that refused were arrested and Zuccotti Park was evicted of all occupiers before 3am. The eviction, though not scheduled, was somewhat expected after several other cities standing in solidarity with Occupy Wall Street had been shut down. On the evening of November 14 Micah White and Kalle Lasn had met and emailed a tactical briefing to friends of Adbusters with a call to declare victory in mid-December and to leave all the occupations (Schwartz, 2011). This sense of victory or ending on our terms seemed to be the best possible end to the actual encampment they had started, as it had started to become a public nuisance of sorts for the major cities hosting hundreds and on some days thousands of people in such concentrated areas. Fearful of the November 17 call for a Global Day of Action to celebrate two months of OWS, Bloomberg made the decision to evict. Instead of the satisfaction of self-proclaimed victory, the occupiers were discussing ways to continue their

occupation. The eviction destroyed four fifths of the People's Library. The entire park was cleared of tents and other structures the protestors were using. Occupiers were then allowed back into the park, after it had been cleared and cleaned as a single file line of individuals without food or large bags were allowed in one by one. Many of the key organizers did not return the next day and instead chose to take a break and come back strong for the 17. Since the eviction occupiers have had to drastically change the way they function in the park (James Barron, 2011).

On November 17, 2011 a global day of action was scheduled to celebrate the two month anniversary of OWS (James Barron, 2011). Marches starting all around the city, but focused in Foley Park and then out to the Brooklyn Bridge and finishing in Zuccotti brought an estimated 32,500 people to shutdown streets all over the city including Canal and 5th Ave. When protestors reoccupied Liberty Square, they forced their way through police barricades and over 200 people were brutally beaten and arrested in the process (OccupyWallSt, News Archive History Nov. 18, 2011, 2011).

It was clear that even though the park was shut down and cleared out, that protestors would not stop. They continued to march and hold GA's in the park. Those that were able stayed awake at night occupying the park space without the amenities they were accustomed to. Some were arrested for lying down but mostly occupiers sat in on discussion and planning around the park as usual after the violent eviction (OccupyWallSt, News Archive History Nov. 25, 2011, 2011). One by one, cities around America had their Occupations evicted starting with Denver, Oakland, New York, Hartford, LA, Philadelphia, and Oklahoma City. Since then, many more have been evicted and the movement has become less about the sheer numbers showing

up in public spaces and more about the message. Forcing the people out of the physical spaces of the parks has forced each working group and subsequent occupy group to hone in on what they are asking for and to organize actions that directly speak to what they want. Marches of course have continued on a weekly basis with varying numbers throughout New York and across the country. But the police brutality and evictions have not been the greatest struggle of the Occupy movement, it has been the movement's constant fight to be understood and heard for what it actually is. Occupy's struggle with identity and philosophy as a social movement has been its greatest challenge.

Struggles with Identity A Middle Class Movement

Francis Fox Piven is eighty years old. She has been an activist, professor, and writer for most of her life. In her most famous work, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* she writes about the superstructure of our society. Some people call this our culture, whatever you call it it is comprised of elaborate belief systems and ritual behavior that we allow as part of our daily lives. We permit these systems to define right and wrong, possible and impossible, and how we behave within our society. Because this superstructure is so pervasive it dictates the occasions on which we can protest and speak out against dominate structures such as the government or Wall Street. Most importantly, our culture negatively effects the situations in which the poor can protest. Our culture limits the expression of these protests while society diminishes the poor's capability to fight for essential freedoms. In 1979 Piven wrote, "at most times, and in most places, and especially in the United States, the poor are led to believe that their destitution is deserved, and that the riches and power that others command are also deserved." Piven writes in this same chapter that the poor are often most

unsuccessful in their protest because they “do not experience monopoly capitalism... No small wonder, therefore, that when the poor rebel they so often rebel against the overseer of the poor, or the slumlord, or the middling merchant, and not against the banks or the governing elites to whom the overseer, the slumlord, and the merchant also defer,” (Francis Fox Piven, 1979).

When Francis Fox Piven stood up in front of the General Assembly at Zuccotti Park with Russell Simmons by her side it was quite a show. She talked about the fight of our lives and how coming to Wall Street is exactly where we needed to be. Her protest in the seventies inspired her writing the *Poor People's Movements* and her words had been heard. One of the greatest critiques of the Occupy Wall Street movement is that it is largely a middle class, white movement that has tried to claim universality and inclusivity from the beginning in pursuit of everything from basic peaceful protest to class warfare. In my experience and from its inception (though many may disagree) this is true. Twenty something to Fifty-something year old white activists with college educations and middle class upbringings take the reins during GA's and in working group meetings. Well, in light of the struggles the poor in this country face and the lack of resources they are provided with, coupled with the political docility forced upon them by our cultures' grotesque disfigurement of entitlement, it makes sense that an influential movement would be born and run through the fold of the middle class. The middle class has access to the corporate monopolies and governing elites the poor do not. Academics, lobbyists, and young professionals are all directly affected by the recession in the US and everyone has had their eye on movements abroad such as Tahrir and the Arab spring. It took the oppression of not just the poor, not just the working class, but also of the white collared middle class for a movement to

be born that can effectively target not the slumlords and merchants, but the true power structures that ultimately define the depths to which our superstructure must fall before the wealthiest of Americans can deem themselves truly happy. This may mean that the middle class, mostly white character of the movement is a blessing in disguise, but there are other identity critiques of OWS that may serve less of a utility purpose.

The leaderless stigma that countless media sources have used against the movement is one that is both false and necessary. Occupiers in fact would not characterize the movement as leaderless, but leader-full. There are many leaders, they call themselves lead organizers, and they have taken charge throughout the protests. It is necessary to have leaders, but their refusal to take credit for what they do is both humble and irritating. In a capitalist society it is difficult for us to not give credit where credit is due. But this tactic prevails over even choosing a whole group of people to represent OWS, because it is the fairest. OWS inherently encompasses too many ideals and issues to have one person, or even several people, be the voice of the 99%.

Sharing this leaderless or leader-full identity, OWS stands among the pioneers of the feminist's movement of the 60's and 70's as well as the gay liberation movement and again WTO. This choice in identity springs from the traditions of 'consciousness raising' and 'the personal is the political.' These traditions allowed the feminists to claim their place at the table; sick of being left out of leadership positions they worked to understand their personal worth as leaders in society. This was true for the gay liberation movement as well, stories were shared in a process of an individual freeing of those feeling trapped in the closet by society's overwhelming oppression of their sexual identities. Both of these movements greatly changed

America's social structure and culture, and they did it without talking heads or proclaiming a leader. (Gautney, October 11, 2011) Actively working against having a single figure head has brought other issues of identity along with it.

Of course the issue of race as part of OWS' identity is one for concern. A survey taken by Fordham University at Zuccotti Park found that "68 percent of the protesters were white, 10 percent were black, 10 percent were Hispanic, 7 percent were Asian and 5 percent were from other races (Speri, October 28, 2011)." It has also been noted that the people of color protesting tend to be from the middle class. The history of oppression and fear faced by the black and brown communities of New York may be keeping them from asserting themselves more directly with the movement. This taste of oppression felt by the middle class that has afflicted lower class and working class minority communities for hundreds of years is spring boarding action strictly by the middle class. To solidify its identity as a movement for the 99%, OWS needs to continue to attract organizers for groups such as the People of Color working group and Occupy en Espanol. Without these individuals the cross-activism discussed earlier becomes the only way in which the movement can identify with minority race and ethnicity groups.

The issues of identity discussed above are for the most part things that can be fixed or asserted even more so to help the movement, but the issue of pigeon holing OWS in opposition to the Tea Party is one that occupiers will have to face no matter how much they protest. In September of 2009 the Tea Party Movement organized a demonstration on the National Mall, it is estimated that over 1 million people attended. The Tea Party works as a third party alternative for extreme right wingers looking to decrease government involvement and

increase property rights. (Kibbe, October 19, 2011) The Tea Party movement has gone uncontested on the left and has drastically shifted the American political environment to the right. As OWS attracts an extreme left constituency they were immediately targeted as an opposition to the Tea Party, while others found more similarities in the two phenomena via libertarian constituency. Tea Partiers tend to identify as Republican or Libertarian and support those candidates. Occupiers do not associate with such narrow party lines. Tea partiers also are centralized around the Contract From America, which is a list of standards that define a Tea Partier. The demographics and ideologies of the two movements are different as well as their tactics. It is still unclear as to whether or not the structure of the Tea Party could be helpful for OWS to adopt. It seems that for all intents and purposes, OWS can be broadly understood by the public as the extreme left opposition to the Tea Party. (Reyes-Chow, 2011)

Where are the 99% going?

I am not a New Yorker. I grew up in rural America and I lived in Manhattan for about three months last summer. During my short stay I walked through lower Manhattan and visited all the Burroughs and I felt the anxiety of the hyper aware masses swarming all around me to the tune of traffic as some kind of frightening threat to my livelihood that could explode into chaos and violence at any moment. It was overwhelming. The ever present reminder of the density of New York in the height of apartment buildings, the filled subway cars, and zero available parking spaces feeds people's fear. The city is demanding. You must walk everywhere and when you are not walking you are on the subway. As you travel around the island via foot or subway or bus or taxi you do not look into anyone's eyes or smile or God forbid talk to a stranger. These are sure fire signs that you are either crazy or that you want something. As

these habits or unspoken rules that every New Yorker lives by become part of your routine you start to think of the colossal psyche of such a place as New York.

Since 9/11, New York has become the closest thing to a battle ground the US has had on domestic soil since Pearl Harbor. The New York police force is now in charge of policing a space with a physical and emotional memory of that day. I was never personally threatened by anyone while I was in New York. I often walked through the city late at night returning from a night out or running to Gristedes to pick up toilet paper but the subconscious air of caution always lingered. My guard was always up, I imagine that this is how every New Yorker feels.

The fear of an escalation of violence in such a high density space is a basis for preparation for just that. This is where the NYPD come in, they are everywhere in New York. I can only imagine the protocols for any kind of disturbance in high traffic areas like Time Square, Union Square, Penn Station, and Port Authority. Protest and organization of large groups of people in any space can be cause for concern by the state and city officials. When big groups of people come together the chances that something could go wrong or that people will be in danger of getting hurt increases. This of course was what the NYPD was expecting on September 17, 2011. Stationed throughout the financial district police officers have become famous for their techniques in dealing with Occupy Wall Street protestors and crowds. In September, just as actions became regular and established in Liberty Plaza videos and photographs of police brutality popped up everywhere. Young women and men peacefully protesting were sprayed relentlessly with blinding Mace. Seemingly innocent protestors resisted arrest as they were dragged bleeding along the concrete into police vans surrounded by other protestors screaming "The whole world is watching. The whole world is watching." The

actions taken by the police to control the crowds of people were strictly to instill fear. It became clear that we are living in a police state. So many young people were brutally beaten with batons and assaulted by police as they were being cuffed and taken away for refusing to give up tarps or their right to be present on a public sidewalk.

Since the November 15 shut down and the explosion of occupy groups all around America it has become clear that if the demands of the 99% are to be truly fulfilled, they must all be recognized. This is where it all comes together; the history of activism in America, the organization of so many hard working angry Americans, the human rights rhetoric, the countless hours sleeping on concrete and marching through crowded streets screaming “mic check!” the struggles with identity, media, politicians, and the police all collide to this point on a road. Where is this road going? There are many paths to be taken. They can be taken simultaneously by many different people or one can stand out from the rest.

Besides the obvious doom and gloom scenario, where Occupy dissolves and is never heard of again outside of the classroom, there are several ways in which the movement can continue to be successful. There are different types of occupiers that would all choose different paths for the movement to follow. The purists, as I like to call them, are those that are at a complete loss for what society has turned into. These individuals want a revolution of the systems and structures that perpetuate indirect democracy, overbearing capitalism, and neo-liberal politics. This group is mostly made up of those that have been part of the movement from the beginning and are comfortable in the action oriented, police antagonizing protests that have made the movement famous. It is likely that the anarchists will be found in this group. They would choose none other than the revolutionary route. Working within a broken

system is not enough or these folks. As much as the media wines or other occupiers get weary, these occupiers will not give in. Continued action by the purists will perpetuate the frustration many feel over the lack of focus. Their actions could lead to escalation of violence but they will not lead to new structures that will potentially work within the preexisting system.

This leads me to the next group, the party people. I don't mean beer, and music, and confetti, I mean choosing leaders, raising money, and finding a political platform on which they may stand. I would characterize these occupiers as day goers. These people have jobs and families and vote regularly. They see the occupation as a way to form a new voice in the pre-existing system as the easiest way to make change palpable. These people have actually listened to the demands of the movement rather than shirk them off as unclear in their demands. They may understand the underlying philosophy of keeping the movement leaderless, but feel that in order for this movement to make an impact it must do what the Tea Party has done. The party people only see the movement as a stepping stone to a political party to rival the Tea partiers.

Lastly, and most realistically there stands the short view. The short view sees not a revolutionary collapse of American government or consumerism, nor do they see the rising up of a new left party. The short view is that of those working with lobbyists and NGO's on the ground to hear what Occupy wants. Those that drafted the 99 Percent Declaration most likely fall into this group. At the end of the document, article V reads,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that IF the July 4, 2012 PETITION FOR A REDRESS OF GRIEVANCES, ratified by the NATIONAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY, is not redressed and acted upon by the government within a reasonable time and to the satisfaction of the Delegates, said Delegates shall reconvene to organize and fund grassroots campaigns in the 435 voting districts for candidates to fill every available Congressional seat in the mid-term election of 2014 and again in 2016 and again in 2018 until all vestiges of the

present corporate state are eradicated, the grievances of the National General Assembly redressed and democracy restored. Only candidates who publicly pledge to redress all of the grievances and solutions contained in the July 4th petition before the 2012 general election will be supported. (The99PercentWorkingGroup, 2011)

These protestors are hopeful that the government will listen and step in to make the changes demanded in the declaration. If the state does not step in this group's goal would be to write legislation one piece at a time and to raise awareness one issue at a time to invoke change slowly but surely. This approach would reform the system from the inside out. Not revolution and not just playing the game or making a show of it, this path could leave a legacy for Occupy with tangible change. Let's actually tax corporations, they are not people. Let's have higher environmental standards and affordable mortgages. Let's provide healthcare and education for everyone. Focusing on local government and legislation, then escalating to state and then federal councils and legislators will lead to progress. It may not take fighting in the streets or a third party candidate winning the presidency to make these things happen.

No matter what path Occupy chooses in the future, it is clear that they have made a mark. In the very least society has found solidarity in anger for the institutions of our government and private society that suppress us daily. Figuring out where Occupy will go next is not an easy task, but these seem to be their options. Now, the spring of 2012, is a pivotal moment in this movement's life. Its leaders can choose to be content with what they have started and let other smaller groups take the reins, or they can push harder than ever before and take their place next to all the lasting movements in America's history.

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